# Central American
# NEWSLETTER

**Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.**
**Editor: Michael P. Birks, 36 Trevor Road, Flixton, Manchester M41 5QH. England. 0161 747 5924.**

**Vol.IV, No. 76** Sample copy $1 / 75p to non-members, see inside cover. **July 1999**

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The Central American Group is a part of the Spanish Main Philatelic Society, the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is *The Mainsheet*, published quarterly, and is free with your subscription. The Secretary is Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, Peterborough PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 01733 2687078. The subscription is currently £8 in Europe or $20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling or US$ should be made payable to "The Spanish Main". A three year subscription of £21/$54 and a five year subscription of £30/$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining during the course of the year the appropriate part subscriptions should be added - Feb-Apr £6/$15; May-Aug £4/$10; Sep-Nov £2/$5 to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect.

The Central American Group caters for the collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £8/$15 resident in the UK or in Europe, or £11/$19 elsewhere. The minimum subscription is one year. If joining after June 1st, add 50% to pay through to the following January when the subscription paid will come into effect. Cheques in sterling payable to "The CA Group" should be sent to the treasurer, David Hankey, 2 Prince's Drive, Marple, Stockport SK6 6NJ, England. Phone 0161-449 0693. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group for overseas members.

We regret we cannot accept dollar cheques for subscriptions because each cheque costs a minimum of £5/$8 to negotiate.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/$1.50 each, although Volumes 1 and 2 are sold out. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/$1.50 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent the the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable. Payments must be made in sterling or in dollar bills.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, Gwrych Cottage, Godstone Road, Bletchingley, Redhill, Surrey RH1 4PL, England. Phone 01883 742186.

The group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russell Court, St Lukes Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 7AP, England. Phone 01628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion from them.

The auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested to do so.

## THE NICARAGUA STUDY CIRCLE

Collectors of Nicaragua may wish to know that a study circle, devoted entirely to Nicaragua, exists and publishes a quarterly journal called **NICARAO.**
Details from the Secretary/Treasurer Erick J Rodriguez
11817 SW 11th Street, Miami FL 33184-2501, USA

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## EDITORIAL

Those of you who were unable to attend the "Railway" meeting recently will be disappointed to know that you missed a splendid array of material from eight Latin American countries.

The largest part of David Hankey's 37 pages of Chile were culled from his humerous display at York last January, coupled with a range of ambulancia covers. Notable for its postcards, David's story of the Longitudinal and Nitrate railways was very informative and created a lot of discussion. Martin Cusworth's 12 pages of trans-Andean material brough home what an engineering marvel this line was. John West showed four pages of early Ambulancia material which aroused a great deal of envy, as did all the material in this section. Nicaragua was represented by Mike Birks who covered not only the stamps but also the train-related markings as well as post cards of the railways being used to carry the US Marines and a share certificate depicting the banana plantation railways.

Colin Eddleston showed material related to the highest railway system in the world, that of Peru. In addition he brought along a range of publications relating to L.A. railway systems. The extent of the railway system in Cuba was brought home by Denis Lavery who augmented his display with personal photographs taken on his trip there, including one which nearly got him arrested as a spy! Tom Butlin's Honduras sparked off a lively discussion with Peter McClure on the 1896/8 issue showing an engine with its cowcatcher. This was the issue Brian showed some years ago. Doug Armitage did a great job of showing and describing the origin and development of a system under the supervision of the same gent who constructed the Costa Rican railway, demonstrating that his expertise is not just limited to the classics of Ecuador.

Peter Brack sent a copy of a very rare block of four of an unissued stamp which he says is the only railway related item from Venezuela. In addition he sent a photocopy of the front page of a rare magazine, the Railway Gazette of 6/12/26, headed "Second Special South American Railway Number". He has very kindly offered to supply copies on request (Brack & Associates Ltd, 66 Friar Gate, Derby DE1 1DJ). From the contents page it would appear that virtually every country in South America is represented. Costa Rica (Richard Saundry) and Columbia (EWC Harris) were on display amongst the competetive exhibits and we understand they got good awards. A good meeting but again the attendance was low.

The good thing about banging your head against a wall is stopping, and it has to be said that without more support this is precisely what will happen to the group as well as to your Newsletter. If people do not attend the meetings and do not send copy for the journal then the only reasonable inference is that the membership just want the packet and no more.

Hamish's wife fell and broke her leg a few days after the meeting and so naturally his thoughts are not with his stamps at present. We wish her a speedy recovery.

**mpb**

For the diary:- Saturday 3rd July 1999. All day. *Midpex*, Coventry.

Note: There will not be a Spanish Main meeting at York this year in view of the clash with the meeting of the Royal Philatelic Society.

Saturday 11th September 1999. Victory Services Club.

Saturday 30th October 1999. London Stamp & Cover Show. Horticultural Halls, London.

Saturday 4th December 1999. Victory Services Club.
AGM & Spanish Main Cup Competition.

# COSTA RICAN TRANSATLANTIC AIRMAIL RATES 1930-1947

## Part 1

by Dr R H SAUNDRY

The number of countries for which a complete list of airmail rates schedules is readily accessible (in English language format) is probably small, and largely confined to the larger countries such as the United States, Germany, the British Cornmonwealth, and France, but with such well researched countries as these there are some excellent "rates articles" hidden away in philatelic magazines[1-4]. Full lists of airmail rates for many other countries certainly exist, but their existence is known only by a very limited circle of collectors specialising in the philately of these countries, who tend to publish exclusively in their own specialist publications. Such airmail rate information will probably only be obtained by consulting these publications, and often necessitates both access to a comprehensive philatelic library and a working knowledge of a foreign language. Currently there is no single standard work in which the aerophilatelist can look up the airmail rate schedule for any given period for all countries, and it is unlikely any such reference work could ever be published: it would perforce be a prodigious and weighty tome, and we can only dream of such a useful tool.

Theoretically the rates schedules for any country can be found in the archives of the UPU in Berne, but few collectors have the opportunity to travel to Switzerland, let alone have the time to access the required information. It is definitely not, however, the primary purpose of the UPU to cater to the needs of philatelists and we currently believe that one cannot simply send written requests to the UPU for information regarding "historic" postal rates.

The airmail rates schedules of most Central American republics are largely unknown or remain under-researched. The airmail rates for Mexico are probably fully recorded and can be found through consulting a number of well researched English language articles[5], but as far as this writer believes even Mexican airmail rates are not to be currently found in a single comprehensive work. Guatemalan airmail rates have been published in a single work[6], and are given in detail up to 1949 but probably the necessary information is not published in sufficient depth to allow easy explanation of unusual but otherwise correct frankings on a "problem" cover. Nicaraguan airmail rates are largely known, despite the destruction of post office archives, since a small number of dedicated collectors have made significant progress reconstructing Nicaraguan airmail rates by the laborious study of the many different frankings found on extant flight covers[7]. The first airmail rates schedule of El Salvador (1930) is well documented[8], but little appears to be available in the more accessible "standard" philatelic works regarding subsequent airmail rates schedules for El Salvador. If El Salvadorean rates have been researched and already published in the relevant specialist journals perhaps it is time someone collated and presented them in English language format in a more accessible and widely read journal. Possibly valuable information such as airmail rates merits publication in several different accessible works, providing problems with copyright can be overcome. Panamanian and Honduran airmail rates seem especially difficult to access by reading current English language publications, and this writer believes them to be fertile fields for original and meaningful research. Any takers here?

In contrast to the situation pertaining to the airmail rates for the above mentioned Central American republics, the airmail rates of Costa Rica for the period 1930 to 1947 have been recorded in some detail. Aficionados of Costa Rican airmails are particularly fortunate in that two extremely important and authoritative contemporary articles concerning the first twenty five years (1930-1955) of the international airmail services of that country was written by H. Dana Mitchell, an extremely competent pioneer specialist in Costa Rican philately and postal history. Mitchell's articles ***"25th. Anniversary of Scheduled International Airmail,"*** **and** ***"Collecting Airmail Covers by Rates"*** **were published in the May-June 1955 issue (Vol. IV, No. 2 page 12, and pp. 13-15) of the** ***"Costa Rican Philatelist,"*** a short-lived philatelic journal that appeared as a run of 33 issues between 1952 and 1955, reaching a maximum circulation of only 60 copies just before its demise following Mitchell's untimely death, also in 1955. Mitchell was Editor of the 'Costa Rican Philatelist, "but the Society of Costa Rican Collectors, SOCORICO, and it quarterly journal "Oxcart" are direct out growths of the "Costa Rican Philatelist". With such a low maximum circulation figure for "Costa Rican Philatelist" it is clear that Mitchell's articles will not be widely known by current collectors and only available with great difficulty. It is timely, therefore, that in 1999 the Publications Committee of SOCORICO are publishing a booklet on Costa Rican airmails under the astute editorship of Dr. Hector R. Mena, Hon Librarian of SOCORICO. Since this useful work purports to be a compendium of most of the significant articles written on Costa Rican airmails, Mitchell's seminal articles are being given due pride of place. In the future, therefore, it is hoped interested aerophilatelic students will more readily be able to access the Mitchell pioneering articles and fully appreciate his almost unique standard of scholarship. In view of his many other philatelic researches and writings we can but marvel at his fervent dedication to all things relating to Costa Rican philately and if only there were more like him with us today. Speaking personally, if for no other reason, latter-day collectors of Costa Rican airmails such as myself owe a great debt of thanks to H. Dana Mitchell.

H. Dana Mitchell's articles were originally written for a philatelic readership almost exclusively comprised of Americans. It is not too surprising, therefore, that the main thrust of his argument was addressed to his compatriots among whom he was trying to engender an interest in collecting Costa Rican airmails. In his review of the first twenty five years of sustained international airmail services for Costa Rica he dwelt exclusively on mails carried by Pan American Airways (FAM Routes 5 and 8 airmail services were inaugurated through San Jose', the capital city of Costa Rica 11th. March 1930) and he did not deal with mails carried by other airlines such as LATI or KLM. Furthermore the main part of his article was concerned with airmails carried from Costa Rica to destinations elsewhere in the Americas. After a very detailed and useful discussion of the Costa Rican FAM Routes 5 & 8 first flight covers (the stamps issued for the service and numbers of covers flown to each destination) he continued with a comprehensive review of the relevant airmail postage rates schedules from the inception of airmail services in 1930 through to a tenth rates schedule introduced 15th. March 1947. Most usefully the article was backed up by a useful table showing the various Costa Rican airmail rates to all the American countries. Whereas the current writer has been unable to verify all the figures (*NB.* Mitchell wrote his article well before the days of personal computers, and as minor typographical errors appeared in the body of his text, it is conceivable minor errors might have occurred within the table), stamps found on Costa Rican flight covers for the period 1930-1947 seem almost without exception to attest to the veracity of Mitchell's data.

Thus Mitchell's table is an invaluable aid for Costa Rican airmail collectors. It is unfortunate that Mitchell does not seem to have left any record of where he obtained his original information: possibly he personally owned the necessary documentary proof which was misplaced after his death.

With the publication of Mitchell's original articles in the SOCORICO airmail book little of value would be served by re-iterating what Mitchell wrote about the Costa Rican airmail rates to American destinations, and any interested reader is highly recommended to consult the original articles, either in the original publication or in the new book. But in one respect Mitchell is somewhat guilty of understating the case for studying airmail rates to countries outside the Americas. This is understandable since he was writing almost exclusively for an American readership.

It would probably serve some useful purpose, I feel, to present in some detail what is currently known about Costa Rican airmail rates to Europe for the period 1930-1947, and thus the reason this current article. Hopefully this will redress in part Mitchell's understandable bias towards Costa Rican "American" airmail rates, but we have to acknowledge once again were it not for the bits of information contained in his articles pertaining to airmails sent to countries outwith the Americas this current review would not have remotely been possible. To provide a convenient reference point where to look up Costa Rican "transatlantic" airmail rates I have collated all the data presented throughout the Mitchell articles, backed up by studies of covers from my own collection, and prepared the accompanying table in which are presented not only the Costa Rican "flown all the way" transatlantic airmail rates, but by way of easy comparison also the airmail rates Costa Rica to the United States, from which we can derive the additional but equally important "part-paid airmail to New York only" transatlantic rates. The postage rates presented are those expected to be found only for the more commonly encountered lower weight letters: higher weights necessarily mean higher tariffs, but through using the table the informed reader should be able to work these out for his or herself.

Furthermore, the interested student of Costa Rican airmail rates should know that, for the earlier period we are considering, the ***foreign registration rate was set at 35 ctmos,*** remained in effect until the early World War II years, was unaffected by the weight of the letters, and I am led to believe was the same on mails sent to all foreign countries. Registration has also to be accounted for when reconciling rates with stamps on flown covers. Also under provisions agreeed at the UPU Congress of London in 1929, from 1 June 1930 UPU members were required to forward airmail covers arriving in their countries, if franked with airmail stamps, to a third country by airmail should such an airmail service exist, and without levying an extra charge. Thus airmail covers from Costa Rica, arriving in England or France, whether or not they were flown all the way from the US or carried across the Atlantic by steamer, if addressed to other European countries would be forwarded from England or France to those countries by air provided such airmail services existed. The important thing here, and in this regard I am reasonably sure I am correct, mails were forwarded on throughout Europe without extra charge. Thus Costa Rican airmail rates were effectively the same to all European destinations and one could send airmail to Stockholm or Prague for the same rate as to London or Paris.

Mitchell only touched very briefly on the airmail rates Costa Rica to destinations outwith the Americas. He writes: -

> *"With regard to the rates to Europe & Asia,* (airmails to destinations in these areas before 1938) *the fee provided for carriage by air only to the appropriate port in the US, New York or San Francisco, from whence the mail proceeded via surface. Specific rates to various Pacific and Asian countries were introduced in July 1935 after the establishment of Clipper flights.* (There then followed a list of various rates to Asian and Australasian destinations, through to 1945). *Actually these Pacific rates are almost academic anyway as few if any covers to these countries are ever seen in the US."*

Mitchell then makes some invaluable comments on transatlantic airmail rates, briefly taking the reader through the rates changes, and finishes off with a telling sentence:

> *"Now and then an air cover to Europe is found in this country* (i.e. the USA) *but only occasionally, and we would not recommend the field to a US collector unless he has good European correspondents."*

During the intervening 40-odd years or so since Mitchell penned his articles there has certainly been a great deal of swapping and trading of Costa Rican flight covers between collectors and dealers alike, and such activities have not necessarily been confined to only trading or swapping between collectors residing each on their own side of the Atlantic. The stamp trade is now truly international, the result being that covers addressed to Europe are nowadays often found in the USA, and vice versa. It is probably true to say that today a US collector could assemble a representative collection of Costa Rican flight covers sent to destinations within Europe just as easily as his European counterpart could. Certainly covers sent to US destinations are commonly found in England.

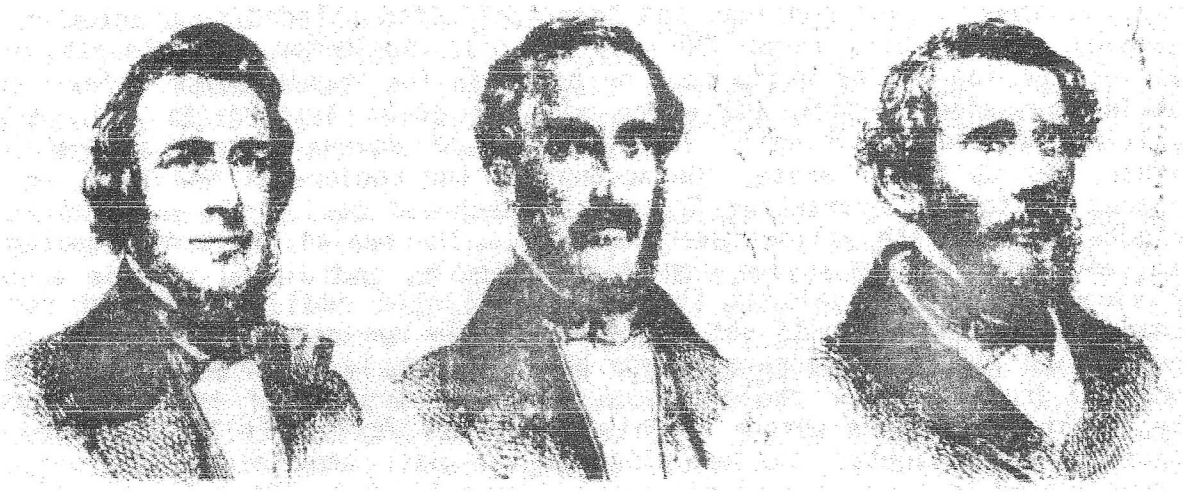
For this very reason, therefore, I do not concur with the last of Mitchell's remarks and I *do* recommend the US collector to seek out and study Costa Rican airmails to Europe. I would, however, have to agree with Mitchell over one important point: Costa Rican airmail covers to Asia or to Australasia appear essentially non-existent (I have never found a Costa Rican flight cover to either Asia or Australasia in dealers' stocks in England for the period after which trans-Pacific airmails, via FAM Routes 14, or 19, became possible, nor have I ever seen any offered in sales catalogues either in Europe or in the USA). Such covers should exist and it probably would only be the collector resident in these areas of the world who would ever find them. Costa Rican airmail covers addressed to Asia or to Australasia must be considered scarce, and from my perspective very rare and desirable items. Reports from other collectors, please!

*to be continued*

# MAILS ACROSS THE ISTHMUS 1840-1955 - Part 3

from an unknown source

In December 1847 Aspinwall traveled to Panama to take a look it first hand, accompanied by the renowned traveller John L. Stephens, whose book on the Mayan archeology of the Yucatan still excites readers today, and the railroad engineering expert James L. Baldwin. They soon decided the technology of the day did not permit the digging of a canal, and that a railroad was indeed feasible - but expensive, dangerous, and difficult. Aspinwall moved quickly, sending Stephens, who was fluent in Spanish, to Bogota to see if a concession could be secured to build and operate a railroad across the Isthmus. Stephens was successful in securing the concession under extremely favourable terms including the exclusive right to build a railroad or canal, the free use of all public lands on the line of the road, plus an additional 250,000 acres anywhere on the Isthmus for a period of 49 years at the yearly cost of a 3% royalty on dividends. Now the Americans had the mail contracts on both sides of the Isthmus as well as the right to tie them together.



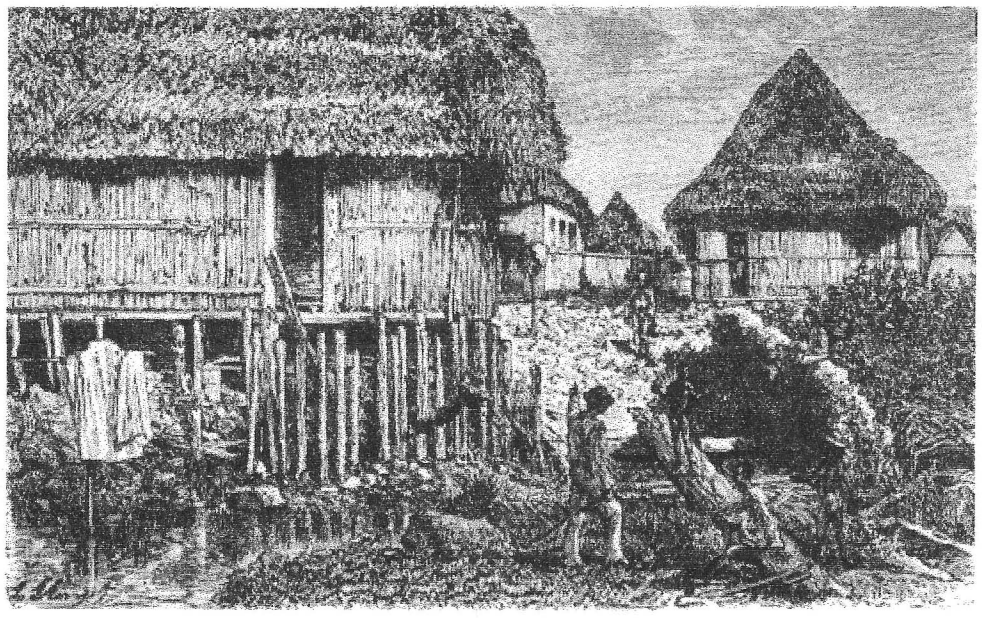
Aspinwall Stephens Baldwin

To put things into historical perspective: in January 1848 gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, California, but word of the great discovery was slow in reaching the ears of Aspinwall. In April he formally chartered the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. and began construction of three wooden hulled, paddle wheeled steamers to meet the terms of the mail contract. The first of these ships, the *California*, was launched in May and left for California in October, just before gold fever struck the East Coast with full force.

Meanwhile George Law and his US Mail Steamship Line was having a more difficult time meeting the terms of his mail contract. In fact, there were so many delays at the shipyards that he was forced to charter the small steamer *Falcon* for his first mail run to Chagres. Not many people had heard of Chagres at the time but it was known in shipping circles as the Caribbean terminus for the small amount of commerce and passenger traffic passing across the Isthmus of Panama.

The *Falcon*, carrying the mail and a mere 29 passengers ticketed to California, arrived in New Orleans just in time to be met by 178 gold maddened 49ers and the staff of Army General Smith, headed for duty in California. The whole clamouring group was squeezed into every nook and cranny of the *Falcon's* deck and hold.

*Falcon* was but the first of many which made the trip in the next few years. Law's service soon became basically routine and very profitable as there was plenty of cargo and many passengers to be picked up at the intermediate stops. Another fleet including *Philadelphia, Alabama, Mexico, Pacific* and the diminutive *Falcon* plied the shorter route from New Orleans. Nor were the mails forgotten. According to Schott the procedures which were developed included a last minute arrival, "just before the steamships gangplank was raised... (of) a light wagon drawn by snorting, prancing horses (which) dashed recklessly through the crowd, bringing the last express and the mails."



The town of Chages at the Chagres river mouth below Fort San Lorenzo.
The town has totally disappeared, although it was a major port of entry early in the gold rush days.

Bayard Taylor, writing in 1850, gives us some recollections of the handling of the mails in the summer of 1849. Law's steamers offered, as we have said before, mail service to Chagres with intermediate stops at Charleston, Savannah, Havana, and New Orleans; however, this does not mean the steamers actually docked at each of these cities every trip. Indeed, Taylor mentions the "service" offered to Charleston (for example) was in this form: "We lay to off Charleston, the fourth night, waiting for the mails, which came on board in the morning with a few forlorn looking passengers, sick and weary with 24 hours tossing in the swells." (waiting, waiting, waiting!). The treatment at Havana was not always superb either, for as Taylor wrote, "On account of the cholera at New York, we were ordered up to the Quarantine Ground and anchored beside the hulk of an old frigate, filled with yellow fever patients. The health officers received the mail and ships papers at the end of a long pole, and dipped them in a bucket of vinegar." The arrivals at Chagres were a good deal more hectic for the ocean going steamers could not often get within two miles of the coast due to the shallow water and dangerous sand bars.

Taylor tells us that "Long before the ship dropped anchor the deck was crowded with piles of luggage. Ignoring the tumult, the ship's purser roughly forced his way across the deck and went ashore in the lighter to send forward the mail and insured express...the purser wanted to take care of his own business first." These first mails from the East were given the same rough treatment as the early 49ers across the Isthmus, and stories of lost mail bags abound in the legends and lore of the day. One of the US Mail Steamship Line's craft, the shallow draft *Orus*, soon began to make daily runs up the Chagres River which traced a tortuous route halfway across the Isthmus and was the only means of access into the interior of the country on the way to Panama City on the Pacific Coast. When the river was high the *Orus* could make it all the way upriver to Gorgona, and at the height of the dry season it could not. John Easter Minter in his book "The Chagres" relates the fate of one mail shipment in those early days when the captain pushed the ship all the way to Gorgona, where "he turned several bags of US mail over to a muleteer with a promise that he would be paid for carrying them to Panama by the captain of the next Pacific Mail steamer". When the native arrived in Panama there was no Pacific Mail boat in the harbour, so he hawked the bags to the highest bidder. It caused a furor in Washington, but that particular consignment of first class matter was never recovered.

This unsatisfactory situation did not last too long, for Aspinwall's Panama Railroad was soon to come to the rescue. Preliminary duties to be accomplished included a US charter for the enterprise. This was done speedily in New York in April 1849. Concurrently with the act of incorporation a Survey party was dispatched to Panama to lay out a line for the railroad.

Locating a suitable line for the railroad was one thing - actually building it another. The greatest enemy - of out many - was sickness, and it was felt soon after the first tree was felled in May 1850, on the previously uninhabited and pestilential Caribbean terminus of Manzanilla Island. All this time the mails were still proceeding up the Chagres on shallow draft craft, and the volume was steadily increasing as the population of California swelled. Undaunted by the difficulties, they moved ahead, and with the selling of the first million of a $5,000,000 authorisation, the Panama Railroad was effectively born.

It was early recognized that the railroad would be a far faster and safer means of transport for the ever increasing business of mail transport, and the leading lights of the enterprise (Aspinwall, Stephens and Henry Chauncey) petitioned the Congress to offer them official recognition and support which would in turn maintain the flow of investment money into the undertaking. They were partially successful in that the House Committee on Naval Affairs recommended an annual mail subsidy of $250,OUO; however, no money was yet appropriated so the real assistance was to be denied until the railroad's success was a bit more certain.

Sickness was the most threatening of obstacles. Shiploads of labourers were brought in from the world over, only to die off nearly as fast as they could be brought in. Many of those who did not succumb to yellow fever, cholera, malaria, or other tropical malignancies were often caught up with the gold fever too. Others were lured by conpeting enterprises for work on the proposed Nicaragua Route. All expenses rose proportionally as demand for supplies and labour caused a great escalation in costs. The terrain was nearly as great an obstacle as health.

The swamps were nearly impenetrable, and when they were finally cleared of trees the mire swallowed up endless quantities of fill before grudgingly allowing the persistent railroad men to advance yet another foot. The streams to cross were numerous and the wood used to build the bridges decayed with alarming speed in the tropics. Likewise the cross ties. Finally, the bridges were rebuilt in iron and the hardest of woods, lignum vitae, was brought in for the cross ties. The wise decision to turn to lignum vitae is borne out by the occasional tie dredged up from the Panama Canal even today - still unpenetrated by rot after over a century, and highly suitable for souvenir bookends and such. But, even as prescriptions for the ailments of the construction days were being slowly and agonizingly developed, the railroad was about to fall into bankruptcy long before it was completed. The original $1,000,000 subscription had been depleted and as there were no immediate prospects of completion it was feared the operation would slide into a semi-caretaker status.

However, small milestones were passed. On 2 February 1851 the first steam locomotive arrived and on 1 October 1851 the first train chugged into Gatun, about eight miles up the line. Now, as some modest success had been attained it was realised the job was too big to be accomplished with the modest million dollar kitty. Shares of Panama Railroad stock fell to 10¢ on the dollar with no takers, but Aspinwall and his fellow backers decided to carry on using their own personal fortunes and the hopes for better days to come. Then came the greatest stroke of good luck. The 1859 *Harper's* is the best contemporary source of insight into the miracle:

In November 1851 two large steamships, the *Georgia* and *Philadelphia,* arrived at the open roadstead of Chagres with passengers from the US en route for California via the Chagres River transit; but the weather was so tempestuous that, after several lives had been lost in attempting to effect a landing, they were forced to take refuge in the harbour of Navy Bay (Aspinwall). It was then proposed that, instead of waiting for fair weather in order to return to Chagres, the passengers should be transported over the railroad to Gatun, from whence they (and tne mails) could proceed up the river in bungoes as usual. There were over 1000 very insistent argonauts to be considered so the railroad chief on the spot thought he'd get rid of the interlopers who were disturbing the work by agreeing to haul them to Gatun for 50¢ each per mile plus $3 per hundred pounds of baggage Even at this very high price there were exactly zero people who demurred. That first day over $7000 in currency was added to the struggling railroad's coffers, and its salvation was at hand. Chagres was soon claimed by the jungle again as all the steamers made Manzanilla Island in Navy Bay their Caribbean terminus. Since the numbers of Argonauts was not yet in ebb the railroad quickly imported passenger cars and more rolling stock to meet the demand.

For half a century Gatun kept its same appearance. With the construction of the Panama Canal it was covered forever by the giant Gatun Dam at this site. During these first hectic years the mails were often the focus which caused things to happen and improvements to be hastened. The chaos at Chagres could not long be tolerated and some form of intergovernmental arrangements simply had to be instituted, especially after the Great Mail Bag Incident of 1849. This situation came to light after several ships arrived in California with no mail - a hanging offense to the lonely argonauts.

*to be continued*

# NICARAGUA: POSTAL RATES FROM 1913 - Part 10

by MICHAEL P BIRKS FRPSL

## The Marine Mail - Surface Mail

Concessionary rates to Marines on active service were the same as domestic rates i.e. 2c per ounce. However not every Marine was aware of this and figure 2 is an example of a cover sent by a Marine on active service (his name is given as a return address to confirm this), who paid the full overseas rate. This rate is confirmed by a cover in my collection *to* Nicaragua, franked 27c also (figure 9).

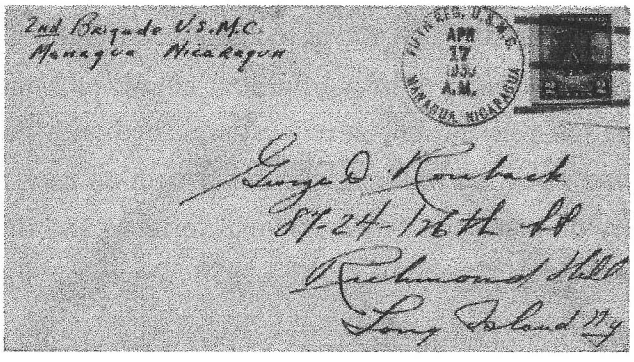



Figure 1. 2 cent cencessionary rate for active service Marines.

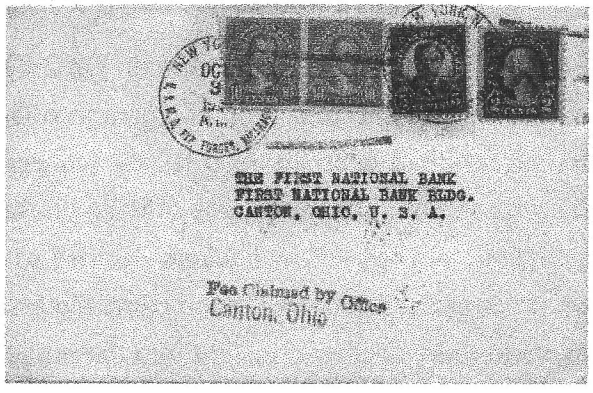



Figure 2. Cover unnecessarily franked 27 cents, the full overseas rate.

I know of only two registered covers - one in my collection and one illustrated in an article. From these two covers I confidently deduce a registration rate of 15 cents!

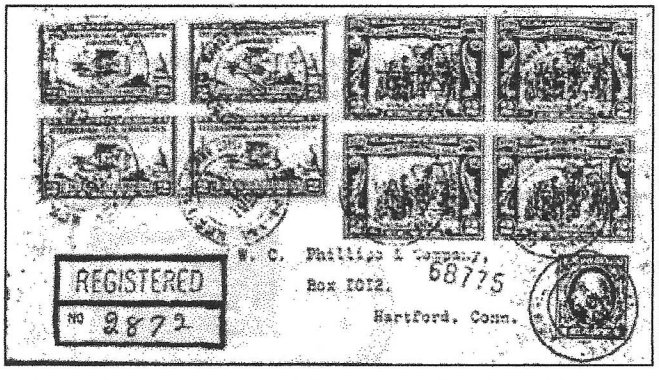



Figure 3. Registered cover from Managua to the USA, franked 17 cents.

2 + 15

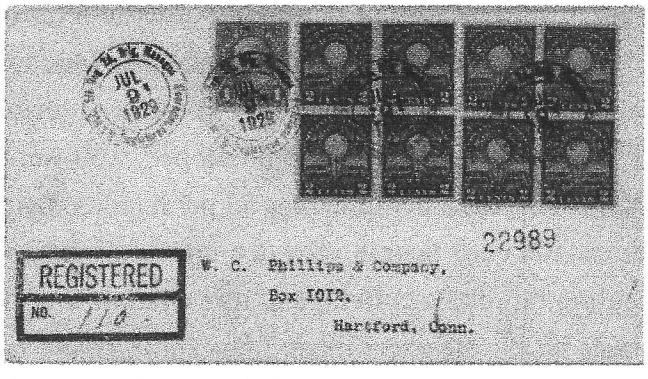



Figure 4. A similar cover to fig 3; 2 cents postage plus 15 cents registration.

## Marine Mail - The Airmail Service

1 February 1927 was the day on which airmail rates were standardised throughout the continental United States. At this time there was no airmail service in Nicaragua but mail could be air speeded on arrival in the United States and the rates which applied back home also applied to the Marines for this service. Figure ~~3~~ 5 is an example of a cover carried to the United States by sea and then put into the air mail system upon arrival. It was 17 days en route to New York by surface and one day to get to Boston from New York by air.

## Domestic Airmail Rates 1927-1934

| Date | Rate per first ounce |
|---|---|
| 1 February 1927 - 31 July 1928 | 10 cents |
| 1 August 1928 - 5 July 1932 | 5 cents |
| 6 July 1932 - 30 June 1934 | 8 cents |

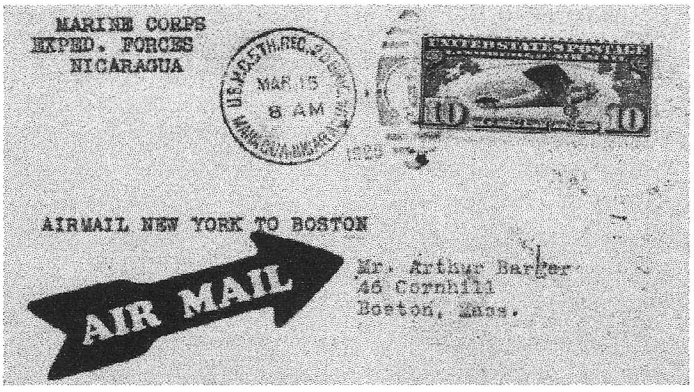



Figure 5 (right). 16 March 1928. Managua to Boston, via New York. Transit times; Managua to New York 17 days by surface; New York to Boston 1 day by air.

Rates were reduced in 1928 to 5 cents for the first ounce and the cover, figure 6, was air speeded to Buffalo. Unfortunately there are no backstamps to give us any indication of the transit times between the various destinations.

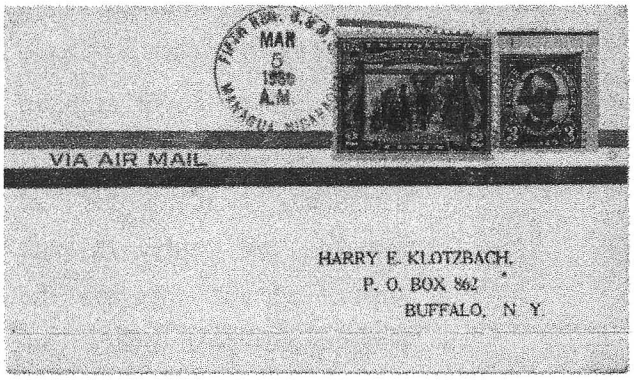



Figure 6. 5 March 1930.
Managua to New York by surface and onward to Buffalo by air.

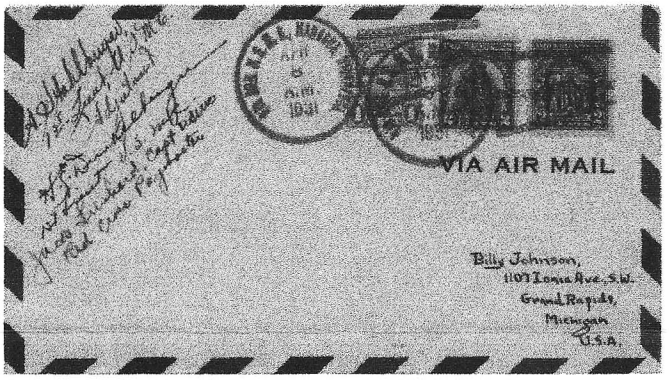



Figure 7. 8 April 1931. Managua to Grand Rapids, MI.
5 cents airmail rate. No backstamps.

15 May 1929 saw the introduction of airmail services to Managua on FAM5 flown by Pan-American airways. Initially the rate was 25 centavos per 14g and some Marines used the service (figure 8).

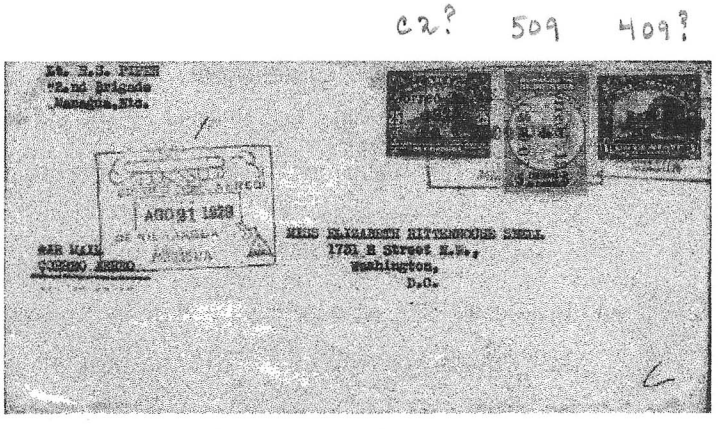



Figure 8. 21 August 1929.
A Marine cover put into the Nicaraguan mails. (Neal West)

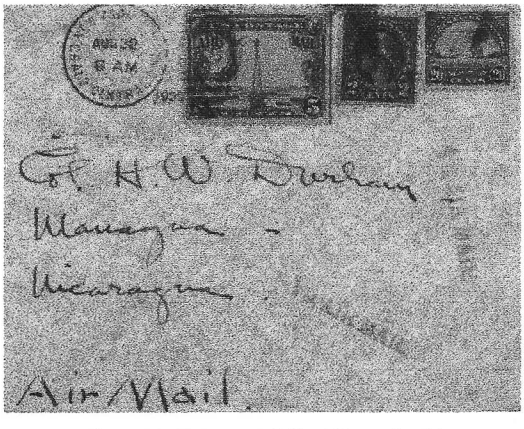



Figure 9. 22 August 1929. 27 cent franking.
Incoming mail to the Marines from Massachusettes.
Backstamped 5th Marine Regiment USMC 25 August 1929.

Correspondence *to* the Marines, however, was subject to overseas rates as Mrs Durham found out when she wrote to her husband, Col. H W Durham. The cover above (figure 9) was carried on FAM5 from New York by Pan-American airways, and backstamped on arrival with a Marine canceller used as an arrival stamp.

On 15 May 1930 the rate was reduced to 15 centavos. Pan-American also accepted mail from the Marine offices who charged 15 cents per ounce.

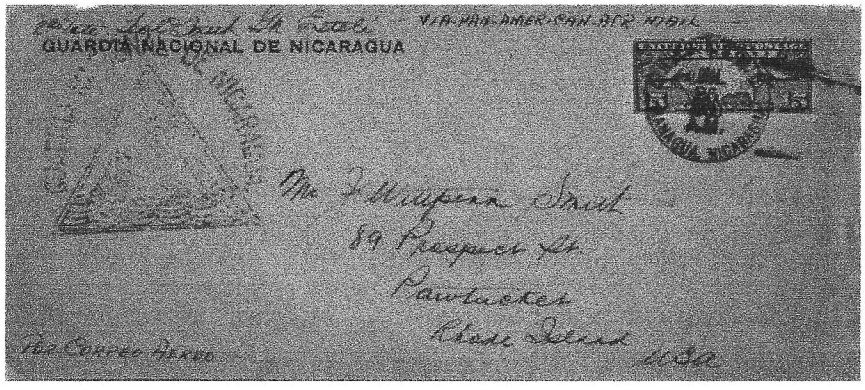



Figure 10. 25 July 1930. Esteli to Rhode Island carried by Pan-American airways on FAM5.

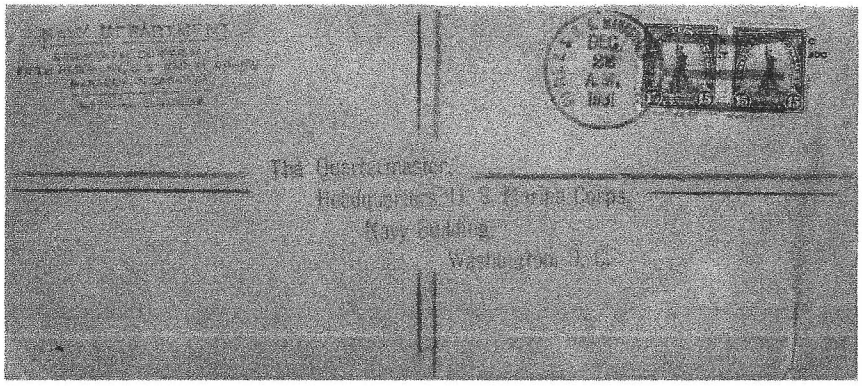


Figure 11. 22 December 1931. A double rate official cover from Managua to Washington, DC. Unlike Nicaraguan mail, the US airmail rate included postage and so neither cover has additional stamps for postage. 15 rate

Since the airmail fee had to be accounted for separately and handed over to Pan-American airways, official covers were franked with airmail stamps whereas surface covers were not. Interestingly I know of no cover carried to the United States, franked with US stamps during the 25 cent period (15 May 1929 - 15 May 1930) and no cover franked with Nicaraguan stamps thereafter. Is it possible that initially the only through airmail service was via the Nicaraguan post office but once the Marines had established such a service it was easier and cheaper to use, rather than having to exchange dollars and buy Nicaraguan airmail stamps, which needed postage and obligatory tax in addition for less than half the weight?

Reference to the rate table will show that domestic airmail rates, and consequently air speeded rates to Marines on active service, were increased to 8 cents per ounce on 6 July 1932. The cover below was posted after that date and is correctly franked, if philatelic, but I have not seen any commercial covers franked at this rate.

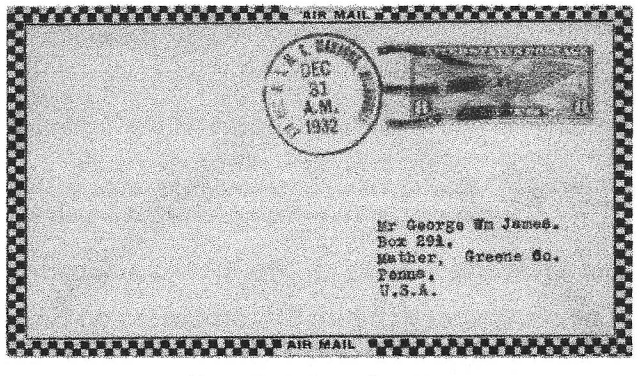



Figure 12. 31 December 1932.
Managua to Mather, Pa. 8 cent rate.

Figure 12 is a philatelic cover posted on the last day of opening of the Marine post office in Managua, 31 December 1932. Functions other than the receipt and despatch of mail had ceased on 5 December 1932.

The final Marine units sailed from Corinto 2 January 1933.